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Our Greek Immigrants

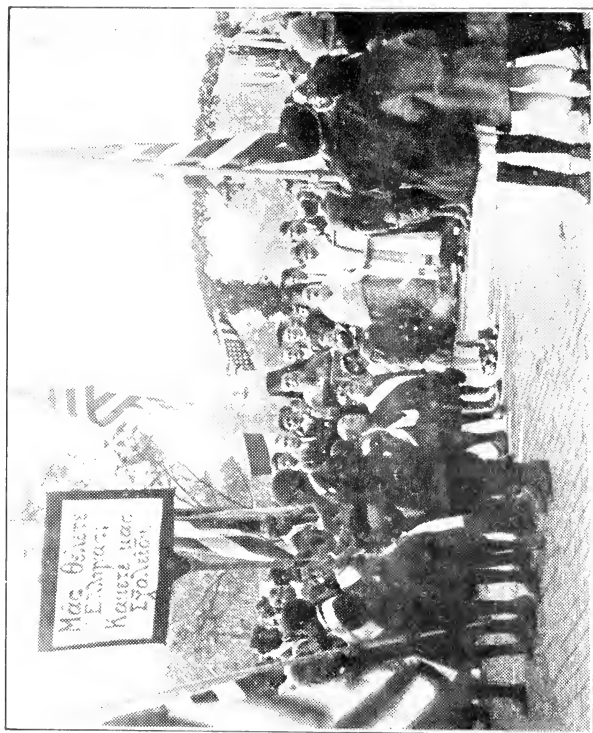
BY

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1921



Greek Procession in Florida

OUR GREEK IMMIGRANTS

Greeks are a comparatively recent addition to the complex stream of American life. In 1848 only one Greek arrived in New York. Ten years later there were two. At the close of the Civil War there were less than 100 Greeks in the United States. In 1886 our Consul to Greece reported that there was no emigration from Greece. In 1900 the total number of Greeks amongst us was about equal to the number that Xenophon led in his famous "Anabasis." In a decade this number increased tenfold. In the single year 1914 we received 35,832. There are twice as many Greeks in America as there are in Athens.

From ancient days the Greeks have been free, venturesome, seafaring men—bold colonizers whose national epic was a story of cruise and maritime adventure. To this natural wanderlust there was added the economic motive in 1891, when the failure of the currant market struck at the heart of this national industry. That year registered an increase in the number of Greeks seeking fortunes in this new land. In contrast to the Hungarian, Polish and early German immigration, the Greek never left home on account of political oppression or religious persecution.

Every section of Greece has contributed to the emigrant stream. The first immigrants were males. Married men came without their wives and children and found quarters together in lodging houses. Women began to arrive in 1905. Fixed tradition forbids their entrance into industry. They are never found in sweat shops. The lad supports his sister until she is settled in life. The women are excellent housewives and their houses are clean and comfortable. They never enter domestic service outside their own families. This is true of the women of Southern Europe generally and lies at the root of our servant problem. Prior to 1890 the immigrants came from England, Ireland, Germany and Scandinavia. From these sources our household servants were recruited. Now our immigrants are largely Italians, Slavs, Hebrews and Greeks. None of these enter domestic service.

When Greeks settle in a locality they organize a "community" made up of all Greeks in the district with officers, executive committee and financial obligations. Its first care is to make provision for religious services. Daniels commends the Greek community as the working model of a broadly democratic plan of organization. Formed primarily for the establishment and maintenance of the church it functions as the representative voice of the colony. There are more than 100 of these communities in the United States. In Manhattan there are four with churches on E. 72nd St., W. 54th St., W. 24th St. and Cedar St. An additional one is being formed

uptown. In Brooklyn there is one community. Greek stores are in evidence in Manhattan, in the vicinity of Madison and Pearl Streets and on 6th Avenue, in the neighborhood of 30th Street.

The Greeks are well represented all through the New England States, where there is scarcely any town that does not number some sons of Hellas amongst its inhabitants. In Lowell, Mass., the colony is concentrated in the vicinity of Market St., beginning at Dutton where the Hellenic character is very pronounced. With almost no exception the stores are Greek for several blocks. The foreign aspect of the neighborhood is intensified at Jefferson Street when we catch a glimpse of the gold dome of Holy Trinity Church which stands out in contrast to the ramshackle buildings about it.

From the Atlantic seaboard Greeks have made their way into Pennsylvania; thence into the Ohio valley. In Cincinnati, the old Franklin Bank on Third St. has been secured for a church—a singularly fitting arrangement, since the edifice is modelled after the Parthenon with a portico of Doric columns.

The procession has moved westward to Chicago which has 3 communities. There is a large colony in the neighborhood of South Halsted St. It is not unusual on Good Friday to see the stores draped in purple and black, and at midnight a procession marches through the street carrying gleaming tapers. The workers of Hull House have met sympathetic response among the Hellenic population. The classic plays rendered by Greeks in their native

tongue are an interesting feature of the activities of this settlement.

From Chicago, Greeks have scattered through the principal towns of the mid-west. The youth are among the patrons of the gymnasium and swimming pools at the Y. M. C. A. They are fond of wrestling and boxing. In Kansas City and Omaha athletic meets are arranged throughout the winter.

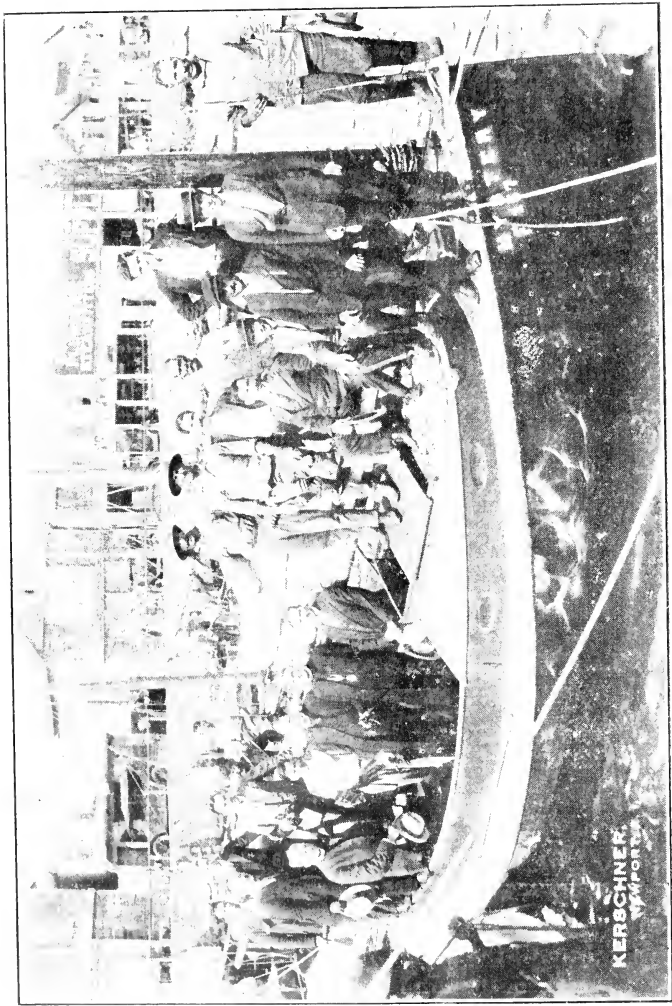
Further westward the immigrant stream has flowed. In Wyoming Greeks are working in the mines at Sunrise. In Salt Lake City there is a prosperous community. On the Pacific Coast they are well represented. A Greek bishop, catching a view of San Francisco bay for the first time, exclaimed with enthusiasm: "Oh, this is just like our country!"

The immigrant has invaded the Southern States. Strong settlements are found in Norfolk, Va., Birmingham, Ala., Charleston, S. C., Savannah and Atlanta, Ga., Jacksonville, Fla., and New Orleans, La. The New Orleans community was established as early as 1867 by Greek cotton merchants, and from its inception the minutes were kept in English. The most striking colony is at Tarpon Springs, Florida, where the life and customs of the homeland are closely reproduced. This is the world's largest sponge centre. The sponge divers are Greeks. The town has a large Greek population, representing every phase of activity. The Hellenic aspect is marked. Many signs along the principal street are in Greek characters, and the newspaper often carries a Greek page. So evenly is the Greek population

distributed that a recent list of Red Cross contributors published in a Greek newspaper represented nearly every State in the Union and contained the names of numerous towns, small, obscure, remote and unfamiliar.

Thus the Greeks have come into every section of our land. And back of the humblest, poorest Greek on our streets are racial traditions connected with the most splendid triumphs of the human mind in art, letters, philosophy, politics. Their language was the vehicle through which the New Testament was given to the world and it is spoken today in America in a form that has undergone less change than our own English since the days of Chaucer.

Not only has the Greek found his way to every section of the country, but he has entered every industry. If you smoke a cigarette, your "Turkish Trophies" bear the name "Anargyros," the Greek founder of the enterprise. Stephanos of Philadelphia and Melachrinos of New York are well-known names in the tobacco industry. If you patronize the confectionery, you will likely find the sign "Olympia," "Marathon" or "Athens," which betokens the Hellenic proprietor who in some places has gained a monopoly in spite of the fact that Plato places a ban on Athenian confections in his ideal Republic. The boot black parlors are largely in the hands of Greeks. The dusty streets of Athens have made the lad expert in this line. As far back as Aristophanes the dicast was on the lookout for a sponge and a basin of oil mixed with pitch for his dusty shoes.



With the Greek Lobster Fishers at Newport, R. I.

The "padrone" system has brought the Greek into unpleasant notoriety from time to time, when it has developed in connection with the shoe shining industry.

If you purchase a bouquet of flowers, you will find that the shop is owned by a Greek. A former mayor of New York became known as a patron of a Greek florist in Brooklyn whose fame and sales were thereby enhanced.

The economic activities of American Greeks extend to peddling, shoe shining, milling, mining, restaurant keeping, sponge diving, fruit vending, the florist and confectionery trades and even the moving picture industry. In Lowell, Mass., large numbers find employment in the mills. In Newport, R. I., they are engaged in lobster fishing. Bishop Peterkin once came upon a group working in railroad construction in a remote county in West Virginia. Furriers from Kastoria in Macedonia have introduced their trade into New York. They claim to have originated the piecing together of small skins to make a large piece.

In economic life the strong elements of Hellenic character come to the fore—independence, self-reliance, ambition. The new-comer stands ready to take the first job that offers. As soon as he accumulates a little money he launches out in some enterprise for himself. Prof. Ross ventures the assertion that every Greek in America is self-supporting. He is a shrewd business man and reproduces the energy and thrift of his ancestors. With true in-

sight Bikelas represents his hero, Loukes Laras, after many wanderings and vicissitudes, declaring himself fit for commerce only. The Greeks have a national genius for business. Given a chance, they excel as clever tradesmen. They long held the balance of trade in the Ottoman empire. Homer unconsciously portrays the Hellenic instinct for keen bargaining when he represents the wily Diomede as suggesting to Glaucus an exchange of arms to seal their friendship, and forthwith he gives his bronze in return for the costly gold armor of the Trojan.

The Greek brings to his new home a spirit of enterprise. He is never found among the applicants for public charity. His crimes are chiefly violations of corporation ordinances and the sanitary code. As he rises in the economic scale the percentage of crime declines.

Irish and Scotch immigrants have been addicted to drunkenness. The Greeks are uniformly temperate. As a race they have always been abstemious. No Greek hero in Homer ever gets drunk. Homeric Greeks drank wine well diluted with water. Sobriety is a national trait. The splendid health of the Greek soldier is due to his sobriety. Surgeons remarked the rapidity with which the soldiers recuperated during the Balkan Wars.

The coffee house takes the place of the saloon or beer garden. This is a distinctively Hellenic institution found all over the Near East and introduced into England in 1652 by Konopios, a Cretan. The

De Coverly papers mention the "Grecian Coffee House" in Devereux Court, kept by Constantine, a Greek who had a new and popular way of making coffee.

The coffee house plays a big role in a neighborhood where Greeks have settled. At any hour you will find men sitting around small tables, sipping Turkish coffee, smoking cigarettes, playing cards, talking politics or poring over the Greek newspaper, which keeps them in touch with the affairs of Hellas. They are great readers of the papers. There are 20 Greek newspapers published in the United States. The pursuit of politics is as engrossing today as in classic times. Aristides Phoutrides says that at the University of Athens the most frequent greeting among the students is "How is politics today?" St. Paul describes the Athenians as spending their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing, and Demosthenes represents the people of Athens as walking about asking one another, "Is there any news?" The discussions of the ancient Greek democracy are vividly reproduced in the coffee houses today. So intense was the feeling in regard to the last Greek election that "Venizelist" printers on a royalist publication in New York struck because a picture of the king appeared in the paper. Greeks, as a rule, rarely join a strike and are not usually connected with labor unions. Nothing short of a political issue could excite them.

The weaker side of Hellenic character manifests

itself chiefly in factiousness and a love of exploitation. The individualism so marked throughout their whole racial history is apparent today in jealousies, feuds, factions, rivalry of leadership and intestine quarreling in the communities, the churches and the press. Among Italians, crimes of violence are common, but with Greeks, the feuds exhaust themselves in mutual vituperation. Not only do the Greeks quarrel among themselves, but they exhibit strong national prejudice and do not work harmoniously with Roumanians, Bulgars or Slavs.

The mill agents at Lowell complain of the factiousness of their Greek employees who form small groups in constant altercation with one another.

This spirit of clannishness is not however to be too hastily condemned. It has its roots in the past. The very word "democracy" is of Greek origin and signifies the rule of the people. The Greek has ever been a lover of personal freedom. He was the world's first teacher in the ideals of liberty. In Athens democracy came to birth. The distinction of Athens in the Periclean Age is an extraordinary phenomenon. Athens was the home of the best ideals of Greece, where the Hellenic spirit expressed itself in political and social conditions that favored individual culture, versatility and personal ambition.

The Greeks have many organizations in America to perpetuate Hellenic culture, foster good citizenship and stimulate commercial activity. These cover

as wide a range as the Pan-Hellenic Union; the Greek-American Athletic Club; the Greek-American Boy Scouts; the Greek-American Chamber of Commerce in New London, Conn., and numerous societies made up of compatriots, such as the Pan-Epirotes, Lacedaemonians and Dodecanesians. The seal of the latter society bears the head of Hippocrates of Cos, the father of medical science.

The Greek Church holds a place of supreme importance in the life of the nation. Among no people is the identity of church and state more thoroughly rooted. Whatever seems even remotely to trespass on the former is regarded as treason to the latter. The content of religion has changed, but the mental attitude of classic times persists. In ancient Greece church and state were intimately allied. Religion and citizenship were identical. The mystical personal aspect was subordinate to the social-political. The modern Greek is born to his religion as he is to his nationality, and no nation presents greater religious homogeneity.

The Church is inwrought in the history of Greece. Through centuries of Turkish domination the Church kept alive the spirit of nationality. Greece owes her existence today to her national Church, and when the hour of Hellenic freedom struck, the clergy led the people in the struggle for liberty. Archbishop Germanos of Patras raised the banner of freedom in 1821, planting the standards of liberty on the same rocks where the famous Achaian League was organized centuries before.

The Hellenic Church is part of the Eastern Orthodox communion which includes the Patriarchates of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem; the Cypriote and the Sinaitic churches and the national churches of the Russians, Serbs, Montenegrins, Roumanians and Bulgarians. The Eastern Orthodox Communion is a confederation with no one head. Nationality is recognized as a controlling influence in ecclesiastical development. Men of diverse races and nations, celebrating the liturgy in different languages, are one in the acceptance of the faith as defined by the seven ecumenical councils. The Latin ideal is monarchical—a government from one centre, obliterating national distinctions. The Eastern and Western Churches differ in spirit and point of view. Eastern theological thought is rooted in Greek philosophy. Western theology reflects the spirit of Roman law.

The Greek liturgy is lengthy, rhetorical, awe-inspiring. The Byzantine with its spacious dome is its native architecture. The ornamentation is bright with blue and vermilion. The churches are built toward the east. There is no instrumental music, and in the solemn chanting we seem to hear the cadences of the Athenian tragedians, reciting the sonorous lines of Aeschylus and Sophocles on the Attic stage.

The interior of a Greek church is very beautiful. The sanctuary is separated from the nave by the iconostasis, after the manner of the veil of the Jewish temple, which screened the Holy of Holies. The

iconostasis is adorned with pictures of Christ, Mary and the saints. These sacred icons are regarded with the affectionate veneration that gathers around a family portrait. Three doors give access to the sanctuary. The central is the Royal or holy door, furnished with a curtain that is drawn at certain points of the service. Within is the Holy Table with a tabernacle, like the ancient ark of the covenant. In the north east corner of the sanctuary is the Prothesis or table of preparation.

There are no pews in a Greek church. The congregation stands throughout the service. The Julian calendar is in use, which differs from our own by thirteen days. The Nicene creed is recited in its original form without the "filioque." The parish priests are married; bishops are unmarried. Long beards and flowing locks are distinguishing marks of Greek ecclesiastics. Baptism is by trine immersion, followed by anointing or chrism. Leavened bread, dipped in wine, is placed in the mouth from a spoon.

The service is in the vernacular. The liturgy is a dramatic setting forth of spiritual truth, ornate, gorgeous, rich in symbolism. Imagery is the breath of the Orient. Religious teaching is pressed home by lights, incense, vestments and processions.

The impressive ceremonial won Russia for the Eastern Church. Tradition is that Vladimir sent an embassy to investigate the religions of the world. When the ambassadors returned with a report of the splendor they had witnessed in St. Sophia in

Constantinople, the scale turned in favor of the Byzantine faith.

The Church of Santa Sophia is the sacred shrine of Hellenism. It was built by Justinian in the sixth century on the site of an earlier edifice. On its completion the emperor exclaimed: "I have surpassed thee, oh Solomon!" It came into the hands of the Turks in 1453, when Constantinople fell. It gathers to itself the dreams, aspirations, sentiments and precious recollections of the past, and every Greek fondly hopes for the day when it shall be restored to the Orthodox Church.

It is not surprising that a people so passionately devoted to their church should take prompt measures to provide the religious ministrations of their ancient faith in their new homes. Congregations have sprung up rapidly all over the country. I came upon a chapel at so remote a town as McGill, Nevada. The Chicago community erected its first building on Johnson Street, in 1898. At many points religious services are held in temporary quarters. Sometimes an existing church has been purchased and remodelled. A number of imposing edifices have been erected after Byzantine models. The churches at Lowell, Mass.; Canton, O.; Gary, Ind.; LaSalle Ave., Chicago, and numerous other centers are a distinct contribution to American architecture. The community of the Annunciation in Manhattan found itself in possession of a building erected by a Baptist congregation, after the model of a church in Sparta. Changes in the neighborhood led the

original owners to move, and the Greeks secured the property.

From the beginning, the Greek churches in the United States were administered in a thorough-going, democratic way. Each community made provision for its own religious needs, advertised for a priest, engaged and dismissed him at will. There was no central ecclesiastical authority. The church was weak in corporate life. The power was vested in laymen, and the priest was distinctly subordinate. Here the religious life reproduced ancient ideals. Sacerdotalism has ever been alien to the Hellenic mind, and the sacerdotal element of religion has been in abeyance.

The congregations found difficulty in securing clergy. Priests who came from Greece did not speak English and did not readily adjust themselves to American life. At Ely, Nevada, there was once a flourishing mining colony, but they met many discouragements in maintaining services. They secured a priest but he grew homesick and returned to Athens in less than three months, and they gave up the attempt to have a resident clergyman and now send to Salt Lake City for a priest when need arises.

In 1918, Meletios, Metropolitan of Athens, came to America with a view to effecting better organization of the churches. He visited the chief centres as far west as St. Louis, seeking to introduce order and system into the ecclesiastical administration. This visit was the first expression of interest on the part of the home Church in the religious life of its

children in America. He remained three months and left Bishop Alexander of Rodostolos in charge of the churches. But the individualism of the Greeks has asserted itself in ecclesiastical affairs and differences over Greek politics have tended to introduce discord.

A pleasing aspect of the Greek churches is the unflinching loyalty of the adherents. The church offers an inspiring illustration of male activity, such as is almost unknown in any other religious body. Male leadership is the normal condition. There is no menace of priest craft or clerical domination. The laymen are in unquestioned control and vitally interested in every detail of administration.

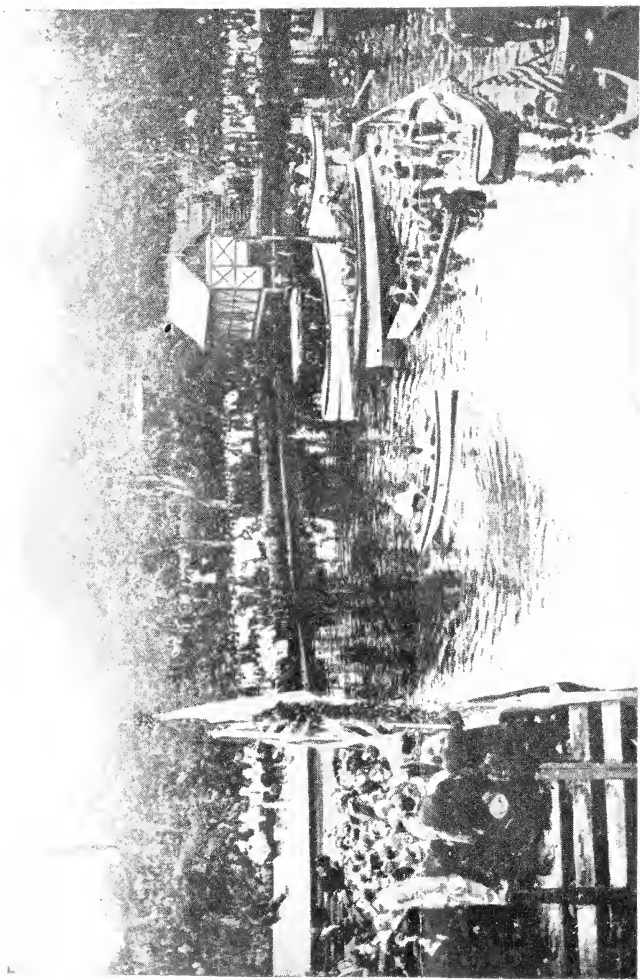
"The scene around a Greek Church on festive days," says Roberts, "is worth witnessing. The spirit of worship in these people is a phenomenon that cannot be found elsewhere in any community."

The Epiphany celebration at Tarpon Springs, Florida, is one of the famous religious pageants of America. It occurs annually on January 19th, when commemoration is made of the baptism of Christ. In the coast towns of Greece this is celebrated on an elaborate scale. The pious Greek believes that fair weather follows the blessing of the water and steamers often await the ceremony before sailing.

The gulf coast of Florida lends itself peculiarly to this picturesque celebration. The sponge fleet hastens into port as the date approaches. Tarpon Springs is astir early in the morning. Tourists arrive by train and motor for the unique occasion.

The principal street is decorated with Greek and American flags. The church service begins early and continues three hours concluding when the priest blesses a huge basin of water and the congregation rushes forward to secure some in every sort of receptacle, from a cream pitcher to a cocoa-cola bottle. Then follows a procession through the street led by the priest in his gorgeous robes. Music is provided by a local band. The congregation, augmented by scores of visitors, marches to the bayou where boats and launches have assembled. Some of them are quaint in construction, painted in bright colors with names inscribed in Greek characters: "ENOSIS"; "ANDRONIKE"; "PILLAROS"; "ARETUSA." Your mind goes back inadvertently to Homer's famous catalogue of ships. One boat carries a great picture of Venizelos at its mast head.

The procession halts in front of Tarpon Inn, one of the finest hostelries in Florida. The spacious veranda commands a fine view of the celebration. The priest advances to a platform at the water's edge. He reads in Greek the story of Christ's baptism. At the words "the Spirit descended like a dove and lighted upon him," a white dove is unloosed, flutters for a moment timidly, then soars aloft and perches on the roof of Tarpon Inn. After the reading of the Gospel, the priest speaks a word of greeting to the men lined up on the boats. Then he tosses a small metal cross into the water. Splash! splash! splash! more than a dozen young Greeks plunge in after the sacred emblem swimming, snort-



Greek Epiphany Celebration at Tarpon Springs, Florida

ing, puffing, wrestling and turning somersaults to the amusement of the onlookers. In a few seconds the cross is found. The successful lad comes dripping to the shore and returns it to the priest amid the applause of admiring friends. The procession retraces its way to the church and the afternoon is given up to festivity. Lads sell flowers from trays along the streets. Tourists visit the Sponge Exchange and watch a good-natured driver don his equipment—a garment of khaki-colored cloth with an interlayer of rubber and a heavy helmet with four glass windows and air pump attachment.

The ceremonies of this day are so unique that they have been reproduced in the "movies." The celebration, last year, was pictured by the daily press in illustrated supplements as far north as Detroit, Michigan..

Thus so homely a toilet article as the sponge awakens a train of psychological associations that lead us to Greece and the Greeks, the glory of Marathon, the splendor of the Byzantine empire, the Hellenic immigrant in America and the picturesque religious customs and observances of the Orthodox Church!

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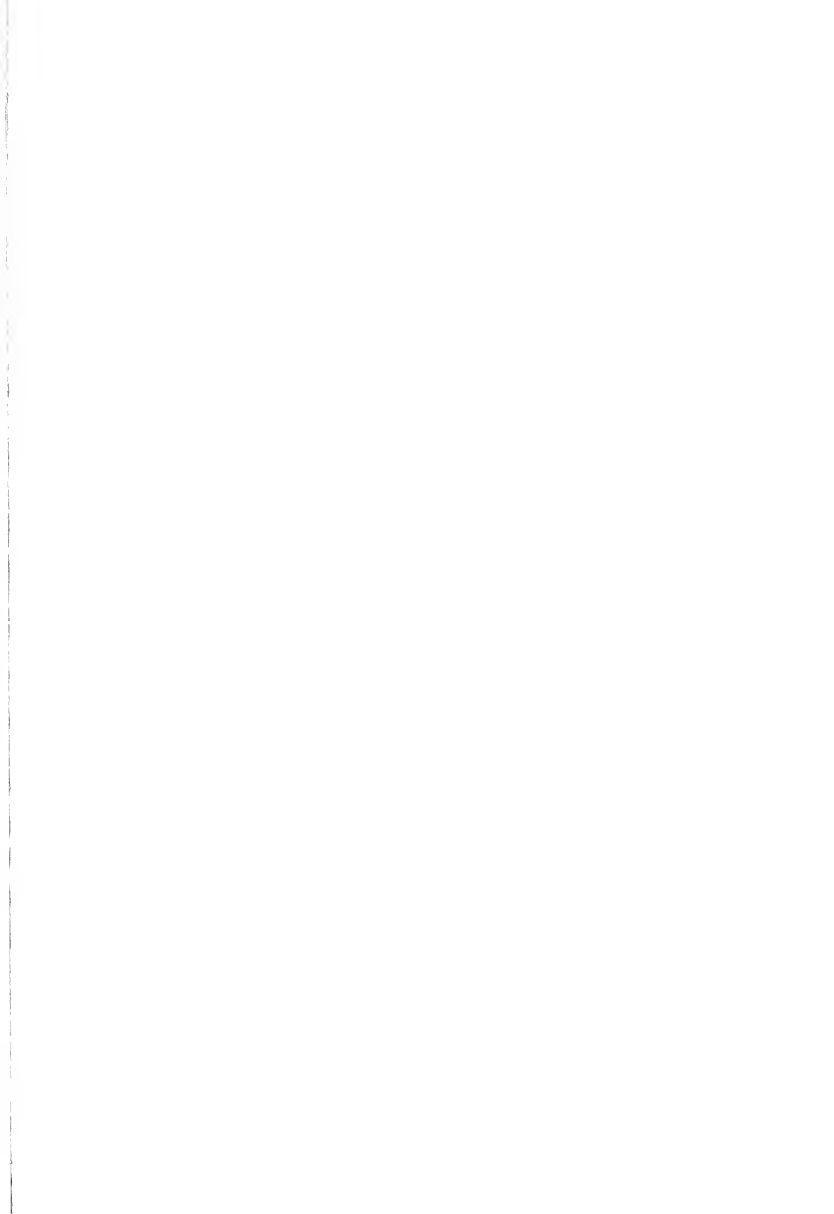
Such, in brief, is the story of our Greek immigrants in America. If the physical geography of their homeland tended from ancient times to foster clannishness and fixed their historical development along the lines of the "City states," isolated one from the other and jealous of local autonomy, so also this same environment begot in them a love of freedom. The two voices which Wordsworth acclaims as "liberty's chosen music" belong to Greece by geographical right. Hellas is a land of sea and mountain, and her children caught the inspiration of the landscape which impressed itself on their racial character in buoyancy, bold independence, restless energy and power of initiative. By tradition and temper Greeks are predisposed toward the democratic ideals of this country.

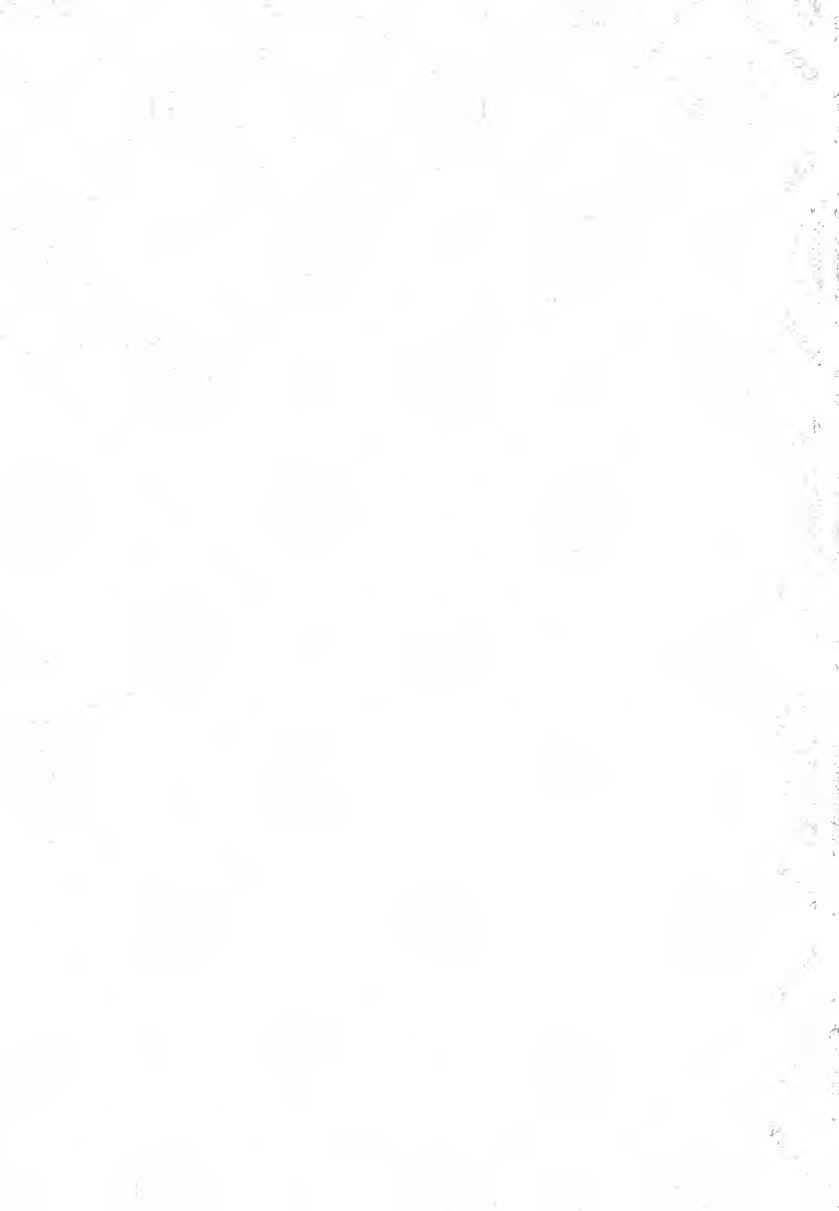
For the past twenty-five years I have followed Greek immigration very closely and have come into intimate personal touch with several communities. The Greeks are in our midst. They have come to stay. One-fifth are already naturalized citizens. Their children are growing up in our public schools. They are bright and learn readily. In every Greek community there are men of education, culture, wealth and leadership, who enter heartily into American life. By reason of their historic love of statesmanship they participate actively in civic affairs. They are public-spirited and adjust themselves easily to American ways. The Greeks in Lynn, Mass., are in active co-operation with public playgrounds and Associated Charities. A num-

ber of the Greek priests have acquired the English language, and the Hellenic Church is destined to exert growing influence as a mighty factor in the righteousness of the nation. Dr. Callimahos, the Brooklyn priest, is identified with the New York Federation of Churches. The tendency is toward ready co-operation in all that makes for moral, religious and civic welfare.

It was my privilege to be associated with Greeks in various lines of activity during the war. Again, it fell to my lot to act as chairman of the Greek exhibit committee of "America's Making." I have been brought into touch with adherents of both political parties and with the representatives of various sections of the Hellenic world—Athens, Sparta, the Dodecanese, Smyrna and Macedonia. My admiration for the Greeks has increased with more intimate acquaintance. I find them congenial co-workers — generous, courteous, enthusiastic, whole-hearted. Inheriting the traditions of the old world's first democracy, they bring to our new world's democracy a kinship of spirit. Their ancestral culture tempers our rudeness. They are one with us in heart. The Greek immigrant makes a precious contribution to America's greatness and is to be counted a valuable asset to American life.







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